

53rd Anniversary - W. L. Main Wreck

1893

1946



25¢

The BANDWAGON

November

1946

TYRONE HERALD May 29, 1943

50th ANNIVERSARY of WALTER L. MAIN CIRCUS WRECK at McCANNS CROSSING -

Just 50 years ago on May 30, 1893 the Walter L. Main Circus enroute to Tyrone from Houtzdale, was wrecked at McCanns Crossing, 4 miles north of Tyrone on the Tyrone & Clearfield branch of the Penna. R.R. resulting in the death of 5 men hundreds of circus animals killed and the destruction of the entire equipment of this then the largest circus in America.

On completing its engagement at Houtzdale on May 29 the Walter L. Main Circus was delayed in leaving that place for its next days performance at Lewistown. At Osceola further delay was encountered. The train finally got under way and passed Summit at 5:09 A.M. starting its fateful descent down the mountain. The crew with engine 1500, was as follows:- Steve Creswell, engineer; Harry Meis, fireman; Wm. Snyder, conductor; James Berger, flagman; Wm. Heverly, John Grazier and Harry Myers as brakemen. The train consisted of 17 cars and caboose, with the car next to the engine carrying the elephants, Jimmie and Lizzie while the last 3 cars were sleepers, with performers and other show members. Other equipment of the train consisted of several long flat cars upon which the wagon cages loaded with animals were placed as well as other wagons of show equipment. A number of stock cars were also carried loaded with horses, ponies and other animals.

Engineer Creswell stated that approaching McCanns Crossing he noticed a slight jump of the train when something about the first car seemed to break, at the same time tearing the tender loose from the engine. Instantly the first car appeared to topple over, with the following cars leaving the rails, all occurring in a few flashing moments to the accompaniment of a thunderous crash of splintered wood and twisted steel. For a fleeting instant which seemed magnified many times a death like silence seemed to enfold the scene to be broken by a terrific up roar from the injured and panic stricken animals.

Before the sun had set in this beautiful day in late May the greatest catastrophe ever to have happened in American circus history had been recorded. Of the cars involved in this crash, some were totally demolished, while the 3 rear sleepers were miraculously prevented from being included, the occupants suffered minor bruises from being shaken up, altho Mr. Main received a slight injury to his neck from which he still continues to feel ill effects.

The lives of 5 men were lost, those being:- Wm. Heverly, brakeman; the ticket agent who was sleeping in the ticket wagon at the time; Thomas Lee and Barney Multaney canvasmen; John Strager of Houtzdale. Eleven injured were taken to the Altoona hospital, some in a critical condition, and despite reported deaths of same, all seemed to have recovered.

Robert Gates, 28, employed on the work train, was killed 2 days later while aiding in clearing up the wreck when struck by a broken cable.

Of a total of 127 horses, colts and ponies, 69 were either killed or had to be killed, many others being badly injured. The toll of trained horses was very high. Sixteen wagon cages which contained menagerie animals were also destroyed, the cages in a manner offering protection to the animals inside. The crash caused many to be broken open giving freedom to the beasts and reptiles inside.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE TWO)

Will buy Photos of ADAM FOREPAUGH CIRCUS-Lot scenes,
Railroad trains, Parade, etc.

W. HARRY FLOYD, 1304 West St. Utica, 3, N.Y.

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An incident of the disaster occurred at the car which contained the elephants. One of the animals was found to have its head pinned down by the wreckage but hardly had the obstruction been removed when the brute struggled to its feet shaking off timbers like straw. Jinnie the smaller of the two elephants suffered an injury to her leg and altho not broken it was permanently lamed to a certain extent. Lizzie the other elephant was not injured.

Dr. Frank Beck of Altoona has vivid recollections of the Main disaster. Residing in Tyrone at the time, he was returning from Altoona that morning and stepping from the train at Tyrone an atmosphere of excitement was noted so asking the reason he was informed of the wreck at the same time observing a number of carriages and buggies driving away with those hurrying to the scene of the wreck.

Dr. Beck was also taken to the disaster and recalls many incidents to which he was a witness. Some snakes which had not escaped to the woods were being recaptured by show people. The lions appeared as somewhat cowed but the elephants were in a different mood, pulling up turf and throwing it in the air as tho to show their disapproval of the calamity. Many monkeys had escaped to near by trees where they kept up an incessant chatter. Several lady performers were observed sadly petting the injured horses, at the same time sobbing bitterly.

Dr. Beck also tells of seeing the dead being taken from the wreckage as well as the finding of one some distance away who had doubtless wandered there when death over came him.

Dr. Geo. Gemmill was the doctor for the Penna. R.R. in Tyrone at that time and when Dr. Beck found at the wreck upon his arrival.

Of all the accounts either oral or written few have ever mentioned what Mr. Main had been doing before or after the wreck. As we sat in the den on the second floor of his home this question was asked, where were you riding at the time of the wreck and how would you describe the scene of destruction as you first saw it. I was riding in the last sleeper he stated and of course we were all in sleeping apparel at the time. After leaving the car I could not believe that the scene before me was other than a dream. I recall seeing a tiger spring for the neck of a zebra which escaped with some injury and later recovered. The tiger attacked and killed a sacred cow later killing a cow belonging to a farmer nearby. While much confusion and uproar came from the various animals all our people were as a rule very calm.

Of the most ferocious beasts which escaped all were either killed or captured before serious harm could be visited upon the residents of the locality. Two show people met injury in being bitten by a lion, these beasts however were captured without much trouble one being taken by a trainer who securely tied it to a tree with a heavy rope. Another lion was choked to death by its struggles in resisting attempts to drag it to confinement.

The tigers proved to be the most vicious and were killed. Another dangerous animal was a ape which presented a problem in its capture. This creature moved but a short distance from the scene and took hold of a stump where it sat for many hours. It did not attempt to harm any person or escape but bared its teeth to any that came close.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE THREE)

SEND AN ORDER TODAY FOR PHOTOS OF CLYDE BEATTY 1946 AT BRANTFORD

SET #1 consists of 12 train views that are tops-\$1.20(616 size)

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E.W.CRIPPS
The BANDWAGON

29 Edgerton St. Brantford, Ont. Canada

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The apes capture was successfully accomplished when two parties proceeded with lassos at the same time from front and rear getting both ropes over its head.

What was the cause of the disaster as the train reached McCanns Crossing? Many are inclined to believe that the shifting of the load in the elephant car as it reached the reverse curve caused it to topple over and leave the rails. Mr. Main is rather inclined to share this theory.

The majority of the animals which were not killed made no attempt to escape but roamed around content with their short freedom and did not go far from the wreck. These included a water buffalo, two camels, a dromedary, zebra, yak, hyena and many small animals from various parts of the world. Alligators were stretched on the ground as if dead but a rub along the nose with a stick proved them wide awake.

The animals which escaped as well as those supposed to have escaped have furnished the basis for countless tales and these in turn have been some what elaborated with the passing of years. Many thrilling stories are told of animals which continued to live in the Alleghenies but those who related them never explained how certain jungle beasts became so readily acclimated to severe Penna. winters.

The tiger which killed the sacred cow soon appeared at the farm of Alfred Thomas where a woman was milking a cow. The woman at once disappeared just as the beast sprang upon the cow killing it. The farmer soon appeared with a rifle and put an end to the tiger.

Another animal reported as being a black tiger was claimed to have been killed by a farmer at Bald Eagle on June 2. This beast was supposed to have been in pursuit of sheep at the time. On the following day a silver tip panther was also claimed to have been shot by Gotlieb Wisner at his farm a mile north of McCanns Crossing as it was making a meal of his chickens at 2 o'clock in the morning.

The Tyrone Herald of June 10 carried this item:-
Another of Walter L. Mains wild animals was killed yesterday by John Parker and Robert Snyder near Vail. The latter was fishing near where the wreck occurred when a wild hog made a dash for him. Dropping his fishing rod he picked up a gun and fired killing the beast.

Mr. Main had no accurate record of the loss of animals and recalling the stories to him, he stated that the animal mentioned as a black tiger was doubtless a black panther. He had seen this animal escaping to the mountains and had often wondered what its fate had been. The report of its killing at Bald Eagle as related to him by the writer was the first knowledge he had of it. The number of panthers seen and killed in this and surrounding counties shortly after the disaster was remarkable indeed. The official records in Harrisburg would indicate that the last (several lines were missing here due to tear in old paper)

The problem of rebuilding a Circus from what resembled a field of carnage seemed as a hopeless and impossible task. So complete had been the destruction that where to start in bringing any semblance of order to this indescribable scene of chaos was unknown. The story of the disaster had been published in every corner of the nation and soon there not only came expressions of sympathy but offers of help as well.

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The show people had asked that the show be rebuilt and the season continued for seeking other work at that time would be a hardship and it was this plea which made the decision of the shows continuance for the remainder of the season.

The financial settlement for the disaster proved rather difficult for adjustment, the Penna.R.R. believing Mr. Mains claim to be rather high. The railroad then countered with an agreement to make full replacement of the loss and to this the circus owner gave his approval. Mr. Main states that the railroad faithfully lived up to their agreement but that he has always felt he had taken a loss.

It is doubtful if any community in the U.S. has ever shown a more humanitarian attitude than revealed by the citizens of Tyrone towards those stricken circus folk. Their gracious offers of help extended to these unfortunates was sincerely recognized as coming from the heart. The doors of private homes and hotels were thrown open to them and they were given food and lodging while the business places invited them to come in and take what ever their needs required, all this being given with put a cent of charge what ever. Mr. Main has said that he failed to find a single instance in which this fine act of benevolence had been abused.

In a few days The Altoona shops were rebuilding or constructing cars and animal cages. Soon tents were taken to Tyrone and erected at Conrads park on the east side of town where members began to recuperate and make plans for continuing the show while many horses had been taken to the armory of the Sheridan Troop which proved a most excellent place for their quarters and treatment of their injuries as well. With a large force of men constantly at work in Altoona many of whom felt a personal interest in helping to the success of the new show, rehearsals were resumed and the date of reopening set for June 8 in Tyrone. In the mean time many horses had been obtained from various sources while zoos and menageries of other shows furnished an assortment of wild animals. The gigantic task of rebuilding the Main Circus was therefore accomplished in 9 days despite early estimates that 2 months would be required.

The opening day arrived as scheduled and Tyrone turned out capacity crowds for both performances. From here on the tour went to Altoona for Fri. and Sat. June 9 & 10 and again capacity crowds. The next stop was Lewistown where the show was headed at the time of its disaster. From here on the belated tour was resumed for the rest of the season.

The damage in the disaster has been estimated at from 100 to 200 thousand dollars, but the loss of patronage for the remainder of the season was another blow which could not be estimated, many keeping away from the box office for fear of seeing a hastily thrown together and inferior show. Tyrone and Altoona had produced good crowds out of sympathy but other stands were very poor.

When the season of 1894 opened Walter L. Main had a bigger and better circus than ever. Four additional cars had been added among them a sleeper named VAIL. The circus continued to grow and the following year (1895) came to Tyrone on Sunday May 26. At 2 o'clock that afternoon a procession of circus people was formed and with its band in the lead made their way to the cemetery to honor the memory of the 3 wreck victims buried there. Over 3000 Tyrone citizens had climbed the hill in advance and joined in the services at the graves. While this proved a beautiful day Monday was cloudy and cold but in spite of this Tyrone again turned out for both performances to make this the best days business so far that season.

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Mr. Main and his show returned to Tyrone at various times during the years that followed always to receive the same warm welcome. The last visit was in 1937 and in that year he retired from circus life.

Pausing half a century later and looking back to that day of the circus disaster we further appreciate the progress that time has brought in our methods of transportation. The lesson learned was not allowed to pass unheeded, and protection measures which followed revealed that those unfortunate victims did not die in vain.

The life of Walter L. Main with his 58 years experience as a show man is a most thrilling one you may have the chance to read of it at some future time. To-day he lives the retired life of a circus man and gentleman farmer as well and says to tell the folks of Blair county that he is enjoying good health, is not bald and has no false teeth. Mr. and Mrs. Main still reside in Geneva, Ohio on Main Street near the shore of Lake Erie.

The story of the circus calamity will be told long after the present generation has passed on and those who hear it will not fail to be aroused by sympathy at the extent of the disaster as well as for that grand old showman and prince of gentlemen-WALTER L. MAIN who rose superior to his misfortunes, continued his circus enterprises undaunted and with the spirit of a hero.

On the 50th anniversary of the wreck Mr. Main has sent the following message to the people of Blair county:-After 50 years it is a proud moment to tell you all that I am still alive and well, and that after this half century I have not forgotten the unselfish kindness and helpfulness on the part of your parents and grandparents during my dark hour at McCanns Crossing May 30, 1893 and to those who are still living and at that time were present and rendered help I send a special message of thanks and gratefulness hoping we can all meet again. I know that all the members send a great big THANKS to F.A. NORTON for sending in the very fine article you have just finished reading.

1907 ROUTE

BARNUM & BAILEY

1907 ROUTE

MAR. 21 to APR. 20 MADISON SQ. GARDEN N.Y. (WINTER QUARTERS-BRIDGEPORT)

APR. 22, 23	READING. PA.	APR. 24	NORRISTOWN. PA.
25	Lancaster. Pa.	26	York "
27	Harrisburg. Pa.	29	Altoona "
30	Pittsburgh. "	May 1	Pittsburgh "
May 2	New Castle "	3	Steubenville. Ohio
4	Zanesville. Ohio	6, 7	Cincinnati. "
8	Springfield. Ohio	9	Dayton "
10	Hamilton "	11	Richmond. Ind.
13	Louisville. Ky.	14	Columbus. Ind.
15	Indianapolis. Ind.	16	Terre Haute. Ind.
17	Evansville. Ind.	18	Vincennes. Ind.
20-25	St. Louis. Mo.	27	Belleville. Ill.
28	Murphysboro. Ill.	29	Centralia. "
30	Decatur. "	31	Mettoon. "
Jun 1	Springfield "	Jun 3	Jacksonville. Ill.
4	Peoria "	5	Bloomington "
6	Danville "	7	Watseka "
8	Lafayette. Ind.	10	Fort Wayne. Ind.
11	Lima. Ohio	12	Findlay. Ohio
13	Toledo. Ohio	14	Adrian. Mich.
15	Jackson. Mich.	17	Detroit. Mich.

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Jun.	18	Flint, Mich.	Jun.	19	Saginaw, Mich.
	20	Lansing, Mich.		21	Ionia, "
	22	Grand Rapids, Mich.		24	Kalamazoo "
	25	Battle Creek, "		26	South Bend, Ind.
	27	Joliet, Ill.		28	Streator, Ill.
	29	Aurora, "	Jul.	1	Milwaukee, Wis.
Jul.	2	Madison, Wis.		3	Sparta "
	4	LaCrosse, Wis.		5	Winona "
	6	Eau Claire, Wis.		8	Minneapolis, Minn.
	9	St. Paul, Minn.		10	Red Wing "
	11	Mankato "		12	Marshall "
	13	Watertown, S.Dak. (Blow down)		15	Sioux Falls, S.Dak.
	16	Sioux City, Iowa		17	Mitchell "
	18	Aberdeen, S.Dak.		19	Ortonville, Minn.
	20	Fargo, N.Dak.		22	Grand Forks, N.Dak.
	23	Crookston, Minn.		24	Fergus Falls, Minn.
	25	St. Cloud "		26	Superior, Wis.
	27	Duluth, "		29	Ashland, "
	30	Ironwood, Mich.		31	Rhineland, Wis.
Aug.	1	Wausau, Wis.	Aug.	2	Appleton "
	3	Menominee, Mich.		5	Escanaba, Mich.
	6	Le Green Bay, Wis.		7	Fond Du Lac, Wis.
	8	Janesville "		9	Racine "
	10	Elgin, Ill.		12	Rockford, Ill.
	13	Dixon "		14	Freeport "
	15	Dubuque, Iowa		16	Cedar Rapids, Iowa
	17	Clinton "		19	Davenport "
	20	Galesburg, Ill.		21	Quincy, Ill.
	22	Keokuk, Iowa		23	Burlington, Iowa
	24	Ottumwa "		26	Oakaloosa "
	27	Marshalltown, Iowa		28	Waterloo "
	29	Albert Lea, Minn.		30	Charles City, Iowa
	31	Fort Dodge, Iowa	Sep.	2	Des Moines "
Sep.	3	Chariton "		4	Creston "
	5	Red Oak "		6	Nebraska City, Neb.
	7	Lincoln, Neb.		9	Omaha "
	10	Norfolk "		11	Grand Island "
	12	York "		13	Beatrice "
	14	St. Joseph, Mo.		16	Leavenworth, Kan.
	17	Atchison, Kan.		18	Chillicothe, Mo.
	19	Hannibal, Mo.		20	Moberly "
	21	Marshall "		23	Kansas City "
	24	Fort Scott, Kan.		25	Springfield "
	26	Joplin, Mo.		27	Parsons, Kan.
	28	Pittsburgh, Kan.		30	Ottawa "
OCT.	1	Emporia, Kan.	Oct.	2	Topeka "
	3	Clay Center, Kan.		4	Beloit "
	5	Salina "		7	Hutchinson, Kan.
	8	Wichita "		9	Arkansas City, Kan.
	10	Guthrie, Okla.		11	Oklahoma City, Okla.
	12	McAlester, Okla.		14	Little Rock, Ark.
	15	Brinkley, Ark.		16	Memphis, Tenn.
	17	Dyersburg, Tenn. (END OF SEASON)			

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SELLS & GRAY'S CIRCUS
C.E.DUBLE

The time was 46 yrs. ago-May 1900. While coming home from school one day my attention was attracted across the street to the Penna. R.R. yards where the Advertising Car No. 1 of the Sells & Grays New United Shows had arrived that morning. I was admiring the gaudy car with elaborate lettering and pictures of circus scenes, when a happy go lucky fellow appeared at the side door and asked-Sonny, would you like to pass a lot of show bills around town and get 2 passes? I did not hesitate to answer, Yes, let me have em right now, and I'll start out with em. He loaded me down with a big arm load of the yellow and pink circus heralds and the passes and I was on my way with wonders of the circus flashing thru my mind. The date of the appearance at my home town, Jeffersonville, Ind. was Mon. May 14. The train was in town early Sun. morning and only a 4 block haul to the lot at Franklin Square. I spent the greater part of that day roaming around watching the tents go up, horses washed, and all the other sights that go to make up the Sunday routine with a circus. I remember a blonde lady came from the pad room and asked me would I take a letter and drop it in the mail box on the corner near by, and I was only too glad to do as she asked. I was up early Mon. morning and from our back yard I could see the entire spread of white tents, as the big top was up and there was plenty of working men with shows in those days. The seats and rigging were being put in place when I arrived. I saw the grand glittering street parade as advertised leave the lot and return. There was a side show, one of the attractions was MAJOR RHINEBECK who was with Ringling Bros. Show for the season of 1897. The colored band leaders name was WOLFSCALES and he was later with the Ringling Show. In the menagerie I recall was 1 large elephant, a water buffalo who was ridden in the parade by a colored gent in the costume of a Zulu warrior and his name may have been PRINCE MUNGO and he later was with Sparks Circus. Several cages all with carvings and paintings on sides and a few camels. The big top was 4 poles with 1 ring. The old time gasoline burners were in use then, oft called the Gale lights. The performance of this circus impressed me as very good. There were some beautiful horses and Miss Edna Maretta was Premier Equestrienne billed as THE GIRL WHO RIDES. She appeared later with JOHN H. SPARKS CIRCUS. There was a gents principal bareback rider who was tops and performed to the strains of an old favorite circus number COMPLACENT QUADRILLE. Bandmaster was Carl Neel well known with the white tops who later was with WALTER L. MAIN. For years he was leader of JAMES ADAMS FLOATING THEATRE. The old time after show was given, black face act, dancers and the comedy trick house and only old timers will recall this slap stick exciting comedy of the old variety theatre days. Leo Blondin was an aerial performer and is now manager of the Oklahoma City Zoo. Will Delavoye was producing clown. The Sells & Grays New United Shows had opened just 2 weeks previous at Elwood, Ind. this accounted for the spic and span appearance of the wagons and the snowy white canvas. All tents were made by Thompson & Vandiveer of Cincinnati, Ohio. A fine route book was put out by shows press agent at close of the tour. The tour covered the mid-west and a great portion of the south, the season closing in Savannah, Ga. late in Nov. and wintered there.

R.B.B.B. have ordered ten elephants from the one and only and very famous FRANK bring em back alive BUCK.

AROUND THE LOTS(by MEMBERS)

The SELLS & GRAYS CIRCUS was owned by William Sells and James Gray and was 15 cars and toured the seasons of 1900-01-02. The title was changed to SELLS & DOWNS for the seasons of 1903-04-05. The show then became COLE BROS. WORLD TOURED SHOWS with Martin Downs owner for the seasons of 1906-07-08-09. In Jan. of 1910 this circus was sold at auction by Fiss-Doerr & Carroll, New York horse dealers. (C.E.Duble)

Mr. & Mrs. Tracy drove to Ont. Canada to catch the Clyde Beatty Circus. On this show is the famous SEALO whose right name is Stanley Barrent. He was born May 14, 1903 which makes him now 43 yrs. old. In the same show are the Albano Sisters (Thelma & Doris) who were born in Atlantic City; Iko & Eko and Iko has lost his hair as he is getting quite old; Barney Nelson armless negro who went to Europe the last time with the Barnum & Bailey Circus. He was 68 last June and was born in 1878 which made him 8 yrs old when he went to Europe, was born in Chicago on Lake street. The day of the show it rained all day but they had a full house for both shows just the same. (J.Tracy)

CORRECTION PLEASE-Sometime ago a story was printed in the Bandwagon that 4 Paw Sells Show had a short season, this should have been HUMMEL & SELLS BROS. John Hummel was a banker and the angel of the show. The show opened at Carthage, Ohio. (Tom Madden)

The money for all Bandwagon pins has been returned and the deal called off due to lack of interest and the very, very few who took the trouble to send in the money for them.

The printed rosters are in the mail and these were paid for out of the pocket of Art Stensved.

Don't forget the Xmas ads, the more ads the bigger the issue, so lets all get together and make the Dec. issue a real catalogue size, try and get your ads in as early as possible, dead line for ads will be Dec. 10. Ads are 20¢ a line with a min. of 5 lines, send all ads and money to VAN MATRE 3328 H St. Phila. Send Now-A Xmas ad for only a Dollar.

E.W.Cripps visited the Beatty show on 3 separate days and got a number of good photos, met J.Crowley and Walter L.Main, Don Francisco and Jack Joyce, also Henry Keyes the band leader. During the shows stay he had a window display in a drug store down town. On the 24th 3 shows had to be run to handle the crowd. (E.W.Cripps)

At all times send all money for dues to W.Pietschmann at 7337 3rd street, Detroit, Mich. LOOK NOW-MAKE SURE YOUR DUES ARE PAID UP.

The photot on this month's cover is an actual reproduction of a once used litho on the WALTER L.MAIN CIRCUS and the original litho is in the collection of John Van Matre.

To make sure you receive your BANDWAGON keep the Editor posted as to your change of address.

 $\frac{1}{4}$ inch scale 8 horse LIBERTY ACT(unpainted)-----\$6
 $\frac{1}{4}$ inch scale SUNBURST WHEELS(unpainted)-----set \$1
5x7 photo of the featured freak SEALO on Clyde Beatty Circus-----25¢
5x7 litho photo of the Jap DONGAH CIRCUS(rare collectors item)----25¢

VAN MATRE 3328 H St. Phila. Pa.

